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New Cal Poly Institute Transforms Waste into Opportunities

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Cal Poly Engineering recently announced the establishment of the Global Waste Research Institute (GWRI), a collaborative effort between Cal Poly and industry to promote the development of sustainable waste treatment technologies and advance current practices in resource management.

Funded by an initial \$1 million grant from Waste Connections, Inc., the Institute will engage faculty and students in projects that investigate all aspects of wastes and byproducts from initial generation to final disposal.

According to GWRI interim director Nazli Yesiller, a geoenvironmental engineer, GWRI holds tremendous potential for Cal Poly students and for finding solutions to handling California's waste, a problem on the magnitude of 50 million tons or more per year.

"GWRI's motto is 'transforming waste into opportunities,'" she said. "With GWRI, I see great opportunity for students to become involved in projects that are outright world-changing. The international partnerships will increase the impact of the research conducted through the Institute and provide global exposure to Cal Poly."

Moreover, she adds, "The Institute will provide training for various stakeholders — students, professional community, regulators, general public — in sustainable waste and byproduct management in California and elsewhere, and contribute to the overall educational focus and 'Learn by Doing' mission of Cal Poly," she said.

According to Cal Poly Civil and Environmental Engineering Professor Jim Hanson, GWRI will facilitate multidisciplinary collaborative research beyond the College of Engineering. "An ongoing project on the reuse of corrugated board in civil engineering applications represents an example of the benefits of working on inter-departmental collaborations," Hanson said. "In this case, Industrial Technology in the College of Business and

the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department will tackle big problems related to life cycle considerations of products and minimizing the detrimental effects of wastes.”

Other examples of ongoing projects include:

- Temperature and gas monitoring at landfills in different climatic regions.
- Beneficial re-use of wastes and byproducts in civil engineering applications.
- Analysis of recycling and composting regulation and infrastructure in California.

“The Institute will represent the only example of its kind in California,” Yesiller said. “Waste is present in all aspects of society and to approach problems and solutions from a broad perspective will permit the Institute to live up to its motto.”

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